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AUTHOR Barnabei, Fred

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of indiscriminate use of counselor reflection, probe, confrontation, and free style on client behavior and client perceptions of counseling. The experiment was conducted at the University of Tennessee with 20 female volunteers from undergraduate education courses serving as subjects and four male and female graduate students in counseling and guidance acting as experimenters. While subjects were instructed to talk about any topic of their own choosing during the 40 minute counseling interview, the counsel counselors followed timed light cues and changed their verbal styles to include reflection, probe, confrontation, and free style. Results show that the indiscriminate use of counselor behavior does not have reinforcing effects on client verbal behavior; thus, training programs that enable the counselor to assess and evaluate his discriminations and their effects on client behavior need to be developed. Such programs would relate more to empirical evidence of client outcomes than to theoretical orientations and biases. (Author/SES)

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DETERMINING THE EFFECTS OF THREE COUNSELOR VERBAL RESPONSES ON CLIENT VERBAL BEHAVIOR

Fred Barnabei
John Carroll University

A perusal of the counseling literature reveals many differences regarding the process of therapy and legitimate counselor styles (Berenson and Carkhuff, 1967; Patterson, 1966). Some theorists suggest that counseling represents a conditioning procedure in which appropriate counselor behavior is the contingent use of counselor reinforcement and the systematic presentation of counselor emitted cues (Krasner, 1962; Ullmann and Krasner, 1965). Others would argue that for therapeutic change to occur, the counselor must offer certain facilitative conditions that are perceived by the client (Rogers, 1951; Carkhuff, 1971) and that the presence of the therapist in the counseling relationship is the important concern (Patterson, 1966).

The philosophical views espoused by these theories have important implications for resulting counselor training programs and counseling research. Counseling research related to learning theory has indeed demonstrated that the systematic manipulation of the counselor's verbal behavior does reinforce and condition the production of specified client responses (Rogers, 1960; Salzinger, 1960; Waskow, 1962; Merbaum, 1963; Merbaum and Southwell, 1965; Kennedy and Zimmer, 1968; Pepyne, 1968; Hoffnung, 1969; Hackney, 1969; Crowley, 1970). These research findings support the notion of training counselors to produce verbal discriminative responses in systematic and contingent ways (Pepyne, 1970).

Many existing counselor training approaches do emphasize specific counselor verbal responses including open-ended questions, reflections, restatements, and confrontations. At the same time, however, most counselors do not learn to emit such verbalizations in a systematic way, contingent upon the kind and type of client response and behavior. In other words, in practice, most counselors are indiscriminate in the application of their learned response style. Thus the effects of conditioning

research paradigms have had little effect upon the counseling practitioner or the counselor educator. The existing studies have not provided evidence regarding the reinforcing effects of such stimuli when they are not produced on cue as in a conditioning setting. Consequently, training programs and counseling literature accumulate descriptions of specified counselor verbal responses based on assumptions of their effects rather than empirical evidence. The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of indiscriminate use of counselor reflection, probe, confrontation, and free style on client verbal behavior and client perceptions of counseling.

PROCEDURES

Subjects

Twenty females served as client (Ss) in the study. Ss were volunteers from undergraduate education courses at The University of Tennessee.

Experimenters

Two males and two females were used as counselors (Es). The male Es were enrolled in a master's degree program in counseling and guidance and the female Es were enrolled in a doctoral program in counselor education at The University of Tennessee. All Es had previously completed at least two counseling practica prior to the study. Because the female Es (doctoral students) demonstrated criterion level for each independent variable in the first role-play interview, the investigator administered systematic training in the counselor responses only to the male Es. The training for each counselor verbal condition consisted of a written model, a video model, video simulation and interviews with coached clients. Criterion levels were established for successful completion of each step of the training process.

Experimental Facilities and Apparatus

Two adjoining rooms described as the interview room and monitor room were used to conduct the study. A vertical 3" x 10" light panel of three 7-1/2 watt light bulbs (red, blue and white) was located on one wall of the interview room behind the client. A Sony TC-95A audio tape recorder located on the desk in full view of the clients was used to record all interviews. A control panel for the lights was located in the monitor room. A one-way observation window permitted the investigator to watch the interview and to operate the control switches for the light panel. All clients were met in an outer reception area prior to the interview.

Treatment Procedures

The Ss were randomly assigned to one of four counselors for one 42-minute counseling interview. Ss were instructed to talk about any topic of their own choosing. The first two minutes of each session were used as a preliminary orientation period which began with the introduction of the S and E. The remaining 40-minutes were divided into four ten minute periods for implementation of counselor stimulus conditions (treatment periods). The treatment periods were monitored by the investigator who was in the adjoining room with a timer. The investigator signaled the end of the preliminary orientation period with a light that introduced the beginning of the first treatment period. Each subsequent treatment period was also cued with a light, the color of which indicated to the counselor which verbal condition was to be implemented during that period (red for confrontation, blue for reflection, white for probe, all three for free style) since E did not know the response sets prior to the interview. The four verbal conditions were operationally defined as follows:

> Reflection of Feeling. "A restatement of what the client is saying in your own words. It is used to reflect the feeling(s) the client is expressing, whether or not the feeling is directly expressed or only implied" (Hackney and Nye, 1971, p. 102). Also, reflection was

defined as: 1) a simple, compound, or complex sentence containing a subject, verb and (but not always) a subordinate clause; 2) a sentence containing an affect word.

Confrontation. "A response indicating some sort of discrepancy in the client's message" (Hackney and Nye, 1971, p. 78). "The statement establishes a 'you said-but look' condition. In other words the first part of the compound sentence is the 'you said' portion. It repeats a message of the client. The second part of the compound sentence presents the contradiction or discrepancy, the 'but look' of the client message . . . . . The first part or the 'you said' portion may not be stated by the counselor. It may be implied instead, if the client's discrepancy is obvious" (Hackney and Nye, 1971, p. 80). Operationally, the confrontation was defined as a compound sentence with two independent clauses, each containing a subject, verb, and (but not always) a subordinate clause.

Probe. "A question, but an open-ended question in the sense that it requires more than a minimal one-word answer" (Hackney and Nye, 1971, p. 64). Operationally, probe was defined as: 1) simple, compound, or complex sentence containing a subject, verb, and (but not always) a subordinate clause; 2) a sentence introduced with either what, how, why, or when.

Free Style. A period in which Es were permitted to use any verbal response.

The order of the verbal conditions for each interview was pre-determined by the investigator who had randomly assigned verbal conditions to treatment periods. During each treatment period E was restricted to the use of the particular verbal

condition associated with the cue light. At the conclusion of all treatment periods all three lights were turned off, signaling E to terminate the interview.

At the end of the session, Ss completed the Counseling Evaluation Inventory (Linden, Stone, and Shertzer, 1965) and an awareness test consisting of three questions:

(1) "What do you think was the purpose of the interview?"

(2) "What evidence do you have for this?"

(3) "Was there anything that you noticed about either the counselor or yourself during the interview?" (Kennedy and Zimmer, 1968, p. 358).

Dependent Variables and Data Analysis

Data for the study were obtained from the taped interviews for 20 Ss. Each interview was transcribed and rated for the designated treatment periods (reflection, probe, confrontation, free style). The three dependent variables were defined:

Affect Word. Any word which implies love or affection, happiness or cheerfulness, enjoyment or pleasure, hope, competence, positive commitment, fear or anxiety, doubt or indecision, dismay or sadness, pain, anger or quarrelsomeness (Crowley, 1970).

Self-reference Pronouns. I, Me, My, Mine, Us, We, Our(s).

Time Orientation. Present verb tense. (Example: give; giving)

Frequency counts were obtained by E and two trained judges for the three dependent variables of client verbal behavior. Reliability for E and the judges was computed by the Pearson r (see Table 1). Ratio scores were computed between the frequency count of each dependent variable word spoken and the number of client words spoken in each cue period. Arcsin transformations as described by Winer (1971) were per-

formed for all ratios and used in a Lindquist Type I analysis of variance of the main effects of each dependent variable (Lindquist, 1953).

The Kruskal-Wallis analysis of variance (Siegel, 1956) was applied to the raw data of the Counseling Evaluation Inventory (CEI) to determine client differences in perceptions of counseling as measured by this instrument.

The awareness test administered at the end of each interview was rated by three judges. Level of awareness ranged from one (no awareness) to four (awareness of the intent of session).

RESULTS

The Pearson r was used to determine the relationship between the number of total counselor words spoken and the number of total words spoken by the client (see Table 2). Results of the data analyses indicated that no significant difference existed between the reflection, probe, confrontation and free style for the three dependent variables. Table 3 shows the results of three 4x4 repeated measures (on the second factor) analyses of variance for affect words, self-reference pronouns, and time orientation. No significant differences were found between Ss assigned to the four counselors in terms of verbal behavior being studied (Table 3). Additionally, no significant differences occurred for Ss perceptions of counselor comfort, counseling climate and S satisfaction as measured by the CEI (Table 4). On the awareness test only one Ss received a rating of two (awareness of a response condition) from one judge and ratings of one (no awareness) from the other two judges. The other nineteen Ss were given ratings of one by all three judges, indicating no Ss awareness.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study have implications regarding the effects of counselor verbal behavior on selected aspects of client behavior. No significant differences

were found between the three responses investigated in terms of client affect words, self-reference pronouns, and time orientation. In initial counseling sessions, counselor-emitted probes (open-ended questions), confrontations, and reflection of feeling responses when used indiscriminately (non-contingently) do not appear to have any differential effects on client affect, self-referent, and time orientation behavior. This finding seems to contradict those approaches which emphasize reflection of client feelings to the exclusion of questioning and confrontative response styles. In particular, these findings do not support the assumptions of Carkhuff's "training as a preferred mode of treatment" which states that: 1) the helper will be most effective in the early stages of helping by responding to the helper with facilitative conditions: understanding, respect, concreteness; and 2) the helper will be most effective in the later phases of helping by initiation of action conditions: genuineness, immediacy and confrontation (Carkhuff, 1971, pp. 170-171). The results of this study suggest that initiation of action conditions of questioning and confrontation in the early stages of counseling have no differential effects than presentation of facilitative conditions of understanding and reflecting.

Since the counselor responses in this study were emitted in a non-contingent fashion, the lack of significant differences indicates that the indiscriminate use of counselor behavior does not have reinforcing effects on client verbal behavior. Training programs that enable the counselor to assess and validate his discriminations and their effects on client behavior should be developed. Such training gives both counselor and client "a choice between meaningful alternatives rather than a situation in which all behaviors are equally acceptable and equally inconsequential" (Ullmann and Krasner, 1965, p. 38). To do otherwise is to carry on a "therapeutic procedure" that is "at best inefficient, at worst magical." (Ullmann and Krasner, 1965, p. 38).

Further research investigations are needed that link operationally defined

counselor behavior to subsequent client behavior both within and outside of the interview setting. This will facilitate the development of counseling styles and training procedures related more to empirical evidence of client outcomes than to theoretical orientations and biases.

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TABLE 1

RESULTS OF PEARSON PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS (r) FOR INTER-RATER AGREEMENT

	Affect Words			Self-Reference Pronouns			Time Orientation		
	E	Judge 1	Judge 2	E	Judge 1	Judge 2	E	Judge 1	Judge 2
E		+.95	+.98		+1.00	+.99		+.99	+.99
Judge 1			+.96			+1.00			+.99
Judge 2									

TABLE 2

RESULTS OF PEARSON PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS (r) FOR COUNSELOR WORDS SPOKEN AND DEPENDENT VARIABLE WORDS SPOKEN

	Affect Words	Self-Reference Pronouns	Time Orientation
Counselor Words Spoken	.00	-.15	-.07

TABLE 3

SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR
AFFECT WORDS, SELF-REFERENCE PRONOUNS, AND TIME ORIENTATION

Source	Affect Words				S-R Pronouns			Time Orientation		
	df	SS	MS	F	SS	MS	F	SS	MS	F
Between Subjects	19	0.134	0.007		0.516	0.027		0.406	0.021	
Groups (G)	3	0.023	0.008	1.1176	0.123	0.041	1.6690	0.051	0.017	
Error (B)	16	0.111	0.007		0.393	0.025		0.355	0.022	
Within Subjects	60	0.137	0.002		0.590	0.010		0.284	0.005	
Treatment (A)	3	0.016	0.005	2.3632	0.005	0.002		0.019	0.006	1.4366
G X A	9	0.015	0.002		0.057	0.006		0.049	0.005	1.2189
Error (W)	48	0.107	0.002		0.527	0.011		0.215	0.004	
Total	79	0.271	0.003		1.106	0.014		0.689	0.009	

TABLE 4

SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE KRUSKAL-WALLIS ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR CEI SCORES

Factor	H
Counseling Climate	1.29
Counselor Comfort	2.09
Client Satisfaction	4.82

$\chi^2_{.95}$ (df = 3) = 7.82